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Arms controls seen needed if 'star wars' is to succeed

By Walter Andrews
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President Reagan's goal of a space-based shield to defend the United States against a nuclear missile attack appears technically impossible without an arms limitation agreement with the Soviet Union, a congressional report said yesterday.

"Assured survival of the U.S. population appears impossible to achieve if the Soviets are determined to deny it to us," the congressional Office of Technology Assessment concluded in a 320-page report entitled "Ballistic Missile Defense Technologies."

The yearlong study, conducted by the non-partisan agency, found it "does not appear very likely" that future technology would make it possible to deploy cheaper and more effective defensive systems rather than more missiles, warheads and decoys to overcome them.

"The technical difficulties of protecting cities against an all-out attack can be overcome only if the attack is limited by restraints on the quantity and quality of the attacking forces," the OTA staff study said. "The Reagan administration currently appears to share this assessment."

An OTA official, who briefed reporters on condition he not be named, said much of the information in the study was based on administration documents and interviews with officials associated with the \$31 billion Strategic Defense Initiative research effort.

In a March 23, 1983, speech, Mr. Reagan said technology was sufficiently sophisticated "to define a long-term research and development program to begin to achieve our ultimate goal of eliminating the threat posed by strategic nuclear missiles."

The OTA study found that "although some people" have interpreted this to mean a perfect leak-proof defense of U.S. cities, such a defense "does not appear to be a goal of the Strategic Defense Initiative program." It cited the Defense Department's annual report on the SDI program earlier this year to support this conclusion.

The OTA study was requested by the House Armed Services and Senate Foreign Relations committees in March 1984. It was completed in June and has since been undergoing a screening to remove classified information.

A spokesman for Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Ind., chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said, "The report seems to have something in it for everybody."

He said the report "basically concludes that a great deal more research and debate

will have to be conducted on this important issue." Mr. Lugar has been and continues to be a strong supporter of SDI, the spokesman said.

An OTA official said early drafts of the report were reviewed by a 20-member expert advisory panel for accuracy and completeness.

Retired Lt. Gen. Daniel, who heads the High Frontier private organization for space defense, resigned from the OTA advisory panel in February saying it "is heavily stacked" with opponents of SDI. He said "the OTA staff appears to be determined to draft a report pleasing to critics of the space-based defense system proposal."

Defense Department spokesman Robert Sims declined comment, saying that the Pentagon had not yet had a chance to review the OTA report. However, a senior defense official in an interview several months ago appeared to attack the very premise of the OTA study — that technology made the addition of more missiles, warheads and decoys more cost-effective than deploying a defensive system.

The official, who declined to be named, estimated that the development of technology could swing over in favor of defense at the expense of offense in the next 10 or 15 years.

The OTA study also concluded that "in essence, the question is whether" a vigorous U.S. space-defense research effort, and the prospects of both sides deploying defensive systems, would make the Soviets more willing to negotiate deep reductions in their missile forces, which can be verified.

The OTA said it was "unable to find anyone" able to propose a plausible agreement that would provide for both missile reductions and the difficult transition to reliance on defensive systems.

Such a transition could lead to a less stable situation, which would tempt one side to make a knockout first strike because as the number of missiles are reduced it would be easier for a defensive system to stop any retaliatory attack by the surviving missiles.

The chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Rep. Les Aspin, D-Wis., said the OTA conclusion showed that "the world could end up less safe than now" if both the United States and the Soviet Union deployed defensive systems. The present stability provided by the threat of retaliatory strikes would be undermined, he said in a statement.

An OTA official declined to go that far. The study showed there was no way to demonstrate today whether deterrence would be strengthened or weakened by deployment of defensive systems, he said.